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U.S. Reports Sharp Rise in Arms Aid to Nicaragua

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 1 — Defense Department officials said today that the Soviet Union had delivered twice as much military equipment to Nicaragua so far this year than it did in all of 1982.

The officials also said the number of Soviet, Cuban and East German advisers in Nicaragua had recently increased.

At the same time, State Department officials said that the flow of arms from Nicaragua to insurgents in El Salvador had slowed but that shipments of ammunition and supplies were continuing.

The Defense Department officials said, however, that most Soviet arms shipments to Nicaragua appeared to be for use by the Nicaraguans. The Nicaraguans have justified their arms buildup because of what they say is a state of war imposed on them by the United States, which supports an insurgency inside the country by anti-Sandinista guerrillas.

Focus on Heavy Weapons

The Pentagon officials said the Soviet Union, in its shipments to Nicaragua since 1981, had concentrated on the delivery of heavy weapons, including tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery and aircraft.

The officials declined to say how their information was obtained, other than to say that they had used both advanced and traditional forms of intelligence gathering.

The Soviet freighter Ulyanov, which was noted by President Reagan in his news conference last week, passed through the Panama Canal from the Caribbean over the weekend and was headed for the port of Cortina on Nicaragua's Pacific coast.

The Ulyanov is the 10th ship from the Soviet Union or its East European allies to go to Nicaragua with military supplies this year, the officials said, compared with five in 1982. In addition, they said, 10 other Soviet bloc ships, mostly from the Soviet Union, are bound for Nicaragua and should arrive within the next few weeks.

The Defense Department officials said the Nicaraguan armed forces numbered 138,000, more than half of the 250,000 that the Government has an-

nounced as a goal. About 25,000 are regular troops, the officials said, but the 50,000 troops in the reserve force have been seeing more active duty. The rest of the Nicaraguan forces are in militia and police units.

An Interest in Air Force

The Pentagon officials said the Soviet Union, which has recently increased the number of its advisers in Managua from 70 to 100, had shown particular interest in improving Nicaragua's small air force by teaching flyers and ground crews.

About 70 Nicaraguan pilots and mechanics completed training in Bulgaria last December, the officials said. About 30 have stopped in Cuba on the way home to continue training, they said, and the rest have returned to Nicaragua.

The officials said five members of the Nicaraguan Air force were currently studying in the Soviet Union, where they are being trained on the MIG-21 fighter. Whether they are pilots or mechanics was unknown.

The Soviet Union has delivered several AN-16 transport planes and MI-8 helicopters to Nicaragua this year, the officials said, but they declined to give numbers. The AN-16 is a twin-engine turboprop that can carry 40 soldiers and their combat loads up to 500 miles. The helicopter can carry 28 soldiers about 200 miles.

In 1981 and 1982, the officials said, the Soviet Union delivered smaller transport planes, helicopters and trainers.

The Nicaraguans have been enlarging several airfields, including what appears to be a main air base at Punta Huete, near Managua, to enable them to accept advanced aircraft, the officials said. Construction has not been completed.

The officials said Cubans appeared to have taken charge of assistance and training Nicaraguan ground forces. Cuba has 5,500 civilian advisers and 2,000 military and police advisers in Nicaragua, the officials said, adding that there were reports that another 1,500 had recently arrived.